Princess Alexandra, Cousin of the Queen

By GORDON LANGLEY HALL

BRITAIN GROOMING NEW AMBASSADRESS

The author of this article, Mr. Hall, covered the goodwill tour of Princess Alexandra and her mother, the Duchess of Kent, in Mexico and South America. Princess Alexandra will assume the mantle of a full-fledged ambassadress for Great Britain when she visits Australia without her mother this August.

THE PLAZA FRONTING the historic basilica of Santa Maria de Guadalope, Patron Saint of Mexico was practically deserted and a small boy dressed in his first grown-up American-style suit complete with long trousers stood in the shadows eagerly waiting his chance. Two very important tourists were inside the basilica—the Duchess of Kent and her daughter, Princess Alexandra.

Practically unobserved the royal pair left the building and began to cross the plaza. They were unattended, Philip Hay, the duchess' private secretary, being detained in the basilica.

Then the small boy darted out into the sunlight and held out his hand for the princess to shake. In a gesture reminiscent of her cousin Princess Margaret, Alexandra never hesitated. She took the youngster's hand and shook it warmly.

But the matter didn't end there. Out of a pocket came a brightly colored autograph book and once more the princess smilingly obliged. She gave him her signature.

All this time the duchess, an amused expression on her face, stood by and watched. By the time Mr. Hay came hurrying up, Erique Tapia, the youngster had smartly bowed, and safely made his retreat with the prized signature.

After the waves of Hollywood movie starlets and rock 'n roll singers who from time to time descend on the Latin countries, Princess Alexandra has left a favorable impression on the teen-agers of Mexico and Peru. She has pleased their mothers, too!

"See how erect she stands," one Peruvian mother commented to her young daughter as they stood in a crowd at Lima waiting to see the princess and her mother. **"She has been taught to sit in a straight-backed chair."**

The teen-agers especially liked her clothes that certainly have done credit to British designers. By the time Alexandra left copies of a blue polka dot cotton dress with low cut peasant blouse neck and large double bow at the waist was already appearing in a home-made version on many Mexican teen-age girls. Large white handbags also got a boost from the royal visit.

Many South American women have gone out of their way to admire the sleek middle-aged duchess with her 26-inch waistline. In countries where black street dresses are still the most fashionable, the duchess has stood out in her youthful white and pale blue sightseeing ensembles. Her informal gypsy headgear has delighted young and old alike on these occasions.

Princess Alexandra has confessed to enjoying most of all her excursion to the sacred ruins of Chichen-Itza where the mighty Mayan civilization once flourished.

Her souvenirs of the goodwill tour include collections of Mexican and Peruvian folk music for her growing record collection at Kensington Palace. There is an extra album of each for another enthusiastic collector—Cousin Margaret.

PRINCESS ALEXANDRA is the daughter of the Duchess of Kent and the late Duke, brother of King George VI. The Duke of Kent was killed on active service with the Royal Air Force during the Second World War.

CITY of SECRETS

ALBANIA'S capital city of Tirana, the seat of a Russian satellite government surrounded by what it regards as potential enemies, is today as little known as Tibet's Lhasa.

Tourists from outside the Soviet bloc are discouraged, and the few Western newspaper correspondents who have managed to visit Tirana since the Second World War have described it as "Europe's forgotten capital." Hardly an dependable reports of the city's development are available. Its population is unofficially reported to have jumped from 35,000 in 1939 to 150,000 today.

Tirana is located on Albania's coastal plain, some 20 miles inland from the Adriatic port of Durres, with which it is connected by one of the country's two railroad lines. The city is almost equidistant from the nation's northernmost and southern boundaries with Yugoslavia and Greece respectively.

Among Europe's capitals, Tirana has only a brief tradition as a centre of government. It was selected in 1922 mainly because the then larger, more suitable city of Scutari was considered too close to the Yugo border and thus within the range of Yugoslav artillery. A British visitor pictured it in 1930 as "an untidy place," being transformed from a "quaint Turkish town" into a modern city.

Until Albania's occupation by Italy in 1939, Tirana's reputation was that of a comic-opera Balkan capital: a city of pretentious government buildings intermingled with Oriental bazaars and Moslem mosques. The parliament building, clearly identified by a large painted sign over the door, was a former Italian casino. King Zog's royal palace was a simple Turkish town house.

The Second World War sent Tirana into an obscurity from which it has yet to re-emerge.

The city itself surrounds an ancient fortress built by Byzantine Emperor Justinian and restored in the 18th century. Its core is Skanderbeg Square, named for the hero of the 15th-century struggle against the Turks, who governed Albania until 1912. Today, a heroic statue of Josef Stalin dominates the square and the block-wide, tree-lined boulevard which bears his name and splits Tirana along its north-south axis. Government buildings, mostly of Italian design, are concentrated around the square.

Russian gifts to Albania in recent years include a state university and a fully equipped motion picture studio in Tirana. Refugees have reported that a city within a city has been built for the numerous Russian advisors to the Albanian government, and that streets leading into this area are protected by barbed wire, barricades, and concrete emplacements. Loudspeakers in the streets relay government radio broadcasts. Nearly all street intersections are guarded by Albanian traffic policemen in Russian uniforms, but traffic is scarce. As late as 1955 there were only 800 automobiles and 1,700 trucks in the whole of Albania.

Observers agree that Tirana has been spruced up under Russian domination, and at least one Italian-built hotel is described as palatial, although its plumbing functions erratically.

Tirana is served by two daily newspapers. It boasts a 50-kilowatt radio station and a small telephone system. The city's telephone directory lists only 400 names in its 19 pages. Russian and Hungarian airlines fly to Hungary, Poland and Russia from Tirana's modern airport, one of the largest in the Balkans. Highways link the capital with Durres, Scutari, Elbasan, and other Albanian urban centres.

Although almost all of Tirana's ties with the West have been broken, one remains strong. The late Tom Mix is still the most popular motion picture actor in Albania. In the Land of the Eagle the exploits of Tom and his horse, Tony, are even woven into tapestries for home decoration.

"Good Lord—you don't suppose she could be what's been dealing up the Republican Party these last few years!"